

The Cultural Identity of Nusantara in a Movie Entitled *Sang Pencerah* by Hanung Bramantyo

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Received: March 8, 2016. Revised: May 3, 2016. Accepted: June 4, 2016

Abstract

Nowadays, during this intercultural era and global challenge, film can be interpreted as a practical strategy to develop meaning and Indonesian cultural identity. Through many singers of audiovisual creation, film has not only served as entertainment, but can also act as an instrument to reflect local values and traditional perspective through the storytelling that has been presented by film director. This role is a significant point to develop local insight and cultural value as the identity of Indonesian film. Although, at some point, this strategy still becomes a problem in Indonesian film fields. *Sang Pencerah* film that was directed by Hanung Bramantyo is one of Indonesian films that attempted to deliver local identity in its storytelling. This research is an endeavour to identify Indonesian cultural identity that has been represented through *Sang Pencerah* film. By applying cultural studies and interdisciplinary as their methods, the researchers acquired some interesting findings. Firstly, aesthetic and thematic elements in the film narrative had a significant relation to traditional and cultural values of Javanese society. Secondly, the meaning of cultural identity also had a linear proportion to spiritual values in life, such as determination, peacefulness, gloriness, tolerance, as well as social understanding. Therefore, it can be concluded that the *Sang Pencerah* film is a manifestation of Hanung Bramantyo regarding to the meaning of Indonesian culture that is based on Javanese society's local wisdom.

Keywords: film; identity; culture; Indonesia; Javanese

How to Cite: Puspitasari, D. G., Sabana, S., & Ahmad, H. A. (2016). The Cultural Identity of Nusantara in a Movie Entitled *Sang Pencerah* by Hanung Bramantyo. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research And Education*, 16(1), 57-65. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v16i1.6768>

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Nusantara society is facing more complex and unexpected cultural bumps. Culture is placed into a mixed interaction between our local and other's culture. Culture seems to become a cumulative experience and behavioral pattern that is interactive, fluid, and 'unfrozen'. Sugiharto (2016, p. 2) consider this as the ability to lead certain situation into the tendency of new reintegration towards the core values of the culture, or in the contrary, it may ruin the core value of the culture

itself. Unfortunately, the consequences of this continuation is the emergence of ontology instability. At this point, cultural identity turns out to be at stake. Here, an attempt in developing practical strategy in understanding meaning that may create and shape the Nusantara's cultural identity is considerably needed. This is resulted from a form of Nusantara cultural identity that has a significant role in constructing integrated and authentic self-conception had by Nusantara society.

On the other hand, in their daily life, the modern Nusantara society is now do-

minated by highly sophisticated screen technology as movie or film. Film as one of screen technology manifestation, is no longer known only in entertainment but also in a range number communication of social, political, economic, art, education, philosophy, and religion ritual. In other words, the film is now turning into one of decisive language means of public communication (Sugiharto, 2013, p. 308). Moreover, it has to be admitted that film industry is increasingly shaping the urban society's mentality (Sugiharto, 2013, p. 309). At this point, McCabe (1985, pp. 51-55) argues that film has its own ability to effectively perform as an ideological construction that legitimates mental and intellectual based on certain interest and point of view. As a result, study about film becomes essential since the film itself is not only a means of entertainment anymore but more of a value.

With this potential, the film can be employed as a practical strategy to study, meaning behind the Nusantara cultural identity. Through various audiovisual symbols that are created, the film is able to become a means of reflection of value and life perspective related to both the aspect of the locality contained in the story and film scenario. In the film itself, the society (viewers) is given to cultural gaze about images related to cultural identity. The film is able to make it viewable and listenable for reflection of images is used as an actual reality towards individuals/society. It thus becomes an inevitable formation of identification process that is effective for the society (viewers).

In the reality, this fact creates a certain problem in the Indonesian cinematic world itself. Even though Indonesian movies are increasingly showing a positive development, however, the strategy used in cultivating the aspect of locality as an identity in Indonesia's films that claiming themselves as employing Nusantara's culture is still arguable within the Indonesian filmmakers. The influence of Hollywood, taste, and market demand usually erodes the self-identity, meaning attached in

Indonesia's local films. This is often failing several Indonesian films in reflecting identity and phenomena of the life of Nusantara society. Several Indonesian action or superhero films, for example, are packaged into a set of fist fights or more to the Hollywood superhero's style. In addition is the tendency of the plot, setting and location that usually take place in foreign countries. These are often done in order to only achieve visual aesthetic value as well as market sale value. Therefore, amid the challenges faced in the recent era, an attempt in packaging Indonesia's film as the practice of studying meaning behind locality and Nusantara cultural identity becomes an essential matter to be studied.

In relation to this, researcher in this study, has chosen a film entitled *Sang Pencerah* by Hanung Bramantyo as an object of the study. The choice is supported by the fact that this film is carried out the story of one influential Islamic figure in Indonesia, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of one of Islamic organizations in Indonesia named Muhammadiyah in 1926. The film is claimed to the historical, cultural, and valuable aspects of Indonesian society during that era, especially for Javanese society. The researcher assumes that this film, through its film maker Hanung Bramantyo, had packaged a storyline that is contained with enormous values of Nusantara's cultural identity. By this assumption, two research questions are raised, 1) how is the relation of the element of aesthetic and thematic in the film entitled *Sang Pencerah* to the formation of society's cultural identity? 2) How do the messages and values contained in the film become understandable for the society?

METHOD

According to the problem raised in this study, interdisciplinary approach was employed in this study. It included the art of film and cultural studies. The method used here was qualitative. Operationally, this approach and method worked by placing culture as a manifestation of society's

behavior, attitude, idea, and product as something dynamics, routine, and complex. This interdisciplinary perspective is born from the theoretical struggle that is motivated by practical phenomenon in the latest cultural development. In this perspective, culture is not seen as a raw and static meaning, but more to a dynamic, progressive, and even subversive. Culture is then interpreted as a process of production and meaning exchange (Barker, 2005, p. 10). Relation that is mutually intersecting within culture necessities various disciplines eclectically. At this point, there is no superior theory and definition which may dominate one's understanding (Kellner, 2010, p. 34).

Eclecticism in interdisciplinary method has a way of working that is based on a specific discipline as the "ontology basis". In this study, the film which is seen as an artwork is the "basis of ontology" that is referred. It means that film as an object of study has to be addressed as an autonomous art institution which is built by relation between aspects within its structure. This acts as the basis of analysis which is then referred as objectivity. This stage is then continued into the next level, which is symbolization. If during the first stage, structural method assistance was needed, in this stage, structural semiotics would also need to be implemented. Here, the artwork of the film is read as a set of markers that refers to several other marks outside of the film itself.

In achieving larger and deeper meaning, reference (marker) has to be explored and dissected up to the maximal limit. The relation between complex markers and signs in semiotics necessitates that study will comprehend all codes (a set of signs and markers that has become one's rule, law, etc.) within the user society. It may in a form of author code, language code, a cultural code, political code, social code, etc. At this point, various relevant disciplines (outside the film) are needed until it may break a deep horizon. The operation method is illustrated in the following Figure 1.

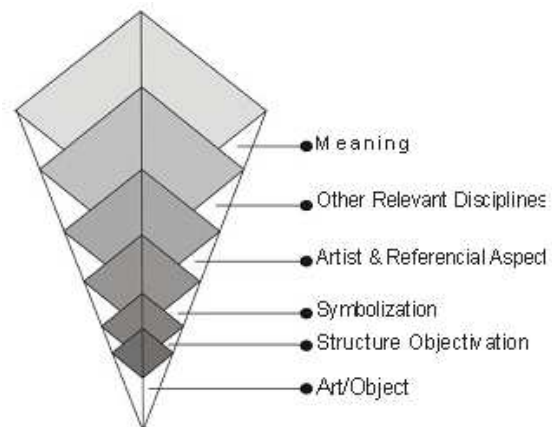


Figure 1. Interdisciplinary Method
Source: Saidi (2008, p. 4)

If the interdisciplinary method is applied orderly based on the previous cultural figure, relevancy will be appeared. The appearance will be in a form of film as an artwork that is placed as cultural artifacts with necessity in interdisciplinary method as its analysis shiv.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Textual Fact of *Sang Pencerah*

The film entitled *Sang Pencerah* tells the viewer about a central figure of one of Islamic organizations in Indonesia called Muhammadiyah named K.H. Ahmad Dahlan (1926). During his struggle in establishing the organization, Yogyakarta society was in poor poverty. The life of the society was in chaos because of Netherland colonialism and greedy local governments. The misery of life felt by society caused them to trap in the practices of superstition, mysticism, and other irrational behaviors. Various attempts had been made by Ahmad Dahlan to solve this problem. As for example, he preached by giving critical statements towards superstition, mysticism, offering ritual, etc. Dahlan had also ever suggested to shift the direction of Qibla, to teach Islam by playing violin, to wear vast or *blankon* (Javanese traditional hat) whenever he delivered his preaching, as well as to change the situation of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) which was previously using only floor and

mat to be equipped with tables and chairs. Dahlan's perspective and behavior were considered as deviated as soon as he expressed his ideas. A mass chaos was then occurred. The follower of *Imam Masjid Besar Kauman*, Kyai Cholil Kamaludiningrat, a central figure of Islam in Yogyakarta in that era who opposed Dahlan, destroyed Dahlan's place where he usually taught his students which was broadly known as *Langgar Kidoel*. However, Muhammadiyah under Ahmad Dahlan successfully found its own place within the society. The born of Muhammadiyah was then known as the sign of the born of a new bright hope (*pencerahan*). Muhammadiyah, until recent days, has had enormous numbers of followers. Besides introducing and strengthening Islam, this organization also takes part in society's education, health, and other social aspects, in order to lead its followers to a situation where they can find a new bright hope (*pencerahan*).

Nusantara Cultural Identity Markers

An identity formation of a certain film is closely influenced by the relation between aesthetic and thematic elements within its structure. Aesthetic element comprises cinematic aspects of the film, such as a visual element, cinematography, editing, and voices, whereas thematic element encompasses film narrative aspect, such as the aspect of the storyline or film theme (Pratista, 2008, pp. 1-2). *Sang Pencerah* is considered as a film that comprehends a considerable amount of aesthetic and thematic symbols which are related towards each other to form a cultural identity in Javanese culture space and time.

From figure 2, it can be seen that a smart execution from Hanung Bramantyo on the artistic aspect of the cinematic of *Sang Pencerah* film, such as: costumes, properties, setting, and lighting. Especially for the lightning aspect, the textual fact of the *Sang Pencerah* film shows that the implicit lighting within the word '*pencerah*' is thematic, and not only deal with the technical term of bright and dark. In its visual narration, it is shown how the lighting

is set based on local perspective. This thematic side is motivated by Javanese local belief. According to semiotic perspective of Pierce (Short, 2007, p. 214), the nuance of brown color which is shown in almost the entire film is the index of old periodical in Javanese space and time. In Javanese philosophy itself, the brown nuance as shown in the film is interpreted as *kesejagatan* or the universe that is based on the value of *manungsa* (people), *jagad* (universe), and *gusti Alloh* (the Creator).



Figure 2. Artistic Management in the Cinematic Aspect of *Sang Pencerah* Film
Source: *Sang Pencerah* Film, Documented by Researcher (2016)

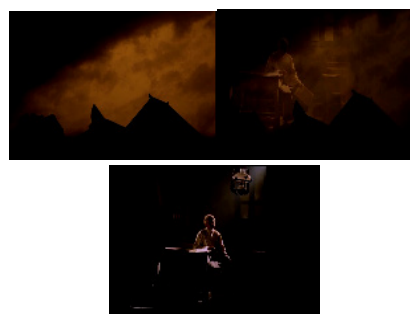


Figure 3. Artistic Management of Lightning Movement
Source: *Sang Pencerah* Film, Documented by Researcher (2016)

Examining the lighting and shadow as the aspect of artistic management in this film has its own attractiveness. *Sang Pencerah* belongs to a film that utilizes lightning movement and shadow aspects as an interpretation aspect which is framed with Javanese cultural code surrounded it. One example of previous theory is shown during the scene in which showing Dahlan is

thinking hard and more to brooding (Figure 3). Dahlan, during that scene, is trying to brace himself in facing all conflicts that he has since all the followers of Kyai Cholil (the antagonist) label him as an infidel Islamic leader. Up to that point, Dahlan strengthens himself to be strong in fighting for his belief.

The scene is focused on dark visual frame, contrast with the shadow of lightning that is directed to the figure of Dahlan. Minutes after that, the lighting seems to be darker and moves to the sky. This lightning visualization can be interpreted as interpretation strategy towards the aspect of lightning on its philosophical level. As discussed before, in Javanese culture, lighting is not merely a technical matter regarding bright and dark, but also a substance with value complexity that is contained within it. The God is interpreted as *Sang Mahacahaya* (The One who gives us a bright hope of life). Referring to semiotic perspective of Peirce, the movement of lightning or illumination can be interpreted as index of spiritual value *rasa* (feeling) and *eling* (remembering). In Javanese philosophy, feeling is an implicit load, the deepest interpretation, and an emotional feeling in one's heart (Soetomo, 2007, p. 13). Further, *eling sing nyimaake* is interpreted as our attitude in always remembering our God as the One who is capable to get somebody to disappear, destroy, eliminate, and abolish certain objects in a short and sudden time. Through this attitude, one is able to strengthen one's own self when evil approaches by and spread out in front of one's eyes. Therefore, one will give one's self to God and believe that He will destroy all evils in human world (Bayuadhy, 2015, pp. 13-15).

Figure 4 shows examples of shadow movement artistic management in *Sang Pencerah* film. This scene emphasizes the event when all Kyai Cholil followers are destroying and burning Langgar Kidoel where Dahlan is usually taught his lesson to his followers. It is shown how group of massive mass is symbolized as silhouette movement reflected in Dahlan's house

wall. The visualization technique of this shadow is related closely to the concept of *solah* in the aesthetic of *sabet* in Javanese puppet. *Sabet* in Javanese puppet illustrates the atmosphere of a particular scene or certain character of actor in puppet show, while, *solah* means the movement of puppet character that draws certain atmosphere or act (Soetarno, 2007, pp. 129-132).



Figure 4. Shadow Movement Artistic Management

Source: *Sang Pencerah* Film, Documented by Researcher (2016)

Other significant aesthetic aspect role in this film is laid in the element of voices. Throughout the film, the soundtrack is packaged in the combination of orchestra, Javanese *gending* (Javanese local instrument), and Islamic character tone. Further, in some dialogs, several scenes are using Javanese language or Bahasa Indonesia in Javanese accent. The interesting part here is one scene which shows one character is singing Javanese traditional song. The scene is shown when Dahlan feels extremely depressed with his condition when he is forced to face kinds of conflict and contra from societies. In that scene, his uncle then supports him while singing a Javanese traditional song which contains valuable meaning. The way of the uncle sings this Javanese traditional song gives the sense of deep emotion that is felt by viewers of the film. The combination between song and visual artistic management that is shown gives the nuance and aesthetic of traditional Java.

The Analysis of Sang Pencerah's Narration Structure

Besides the role of relation between aesthetic elements, the formation of Nusantara culture identity in Sang Pencerah Film can be also identified from its narrative aspect. It becomes interesting since the formation of cultural identity of Nusantara is resulted from the strategy of contradiction between two main characters in the film (K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Kyai Cholil Kamaludiningrat). Conflict between these characters is able to string up various events for the next story to begin.

Referring to the structural linguistic perspective from Ferdinand de Saussure (1990), generally, it is clearly seen that the structure of this film is constructed by dichotomy or binary opposition. The binary oppositions in this film are: Ahmad Dahlan-Kyai Cholil Kamaludiningrat, enlightenment-darkness, Kauman Great Mosque-Langgar Kidoel, smartness-stupidity, modern-traditional, rationality-mystic, rich-poor, vast-*lurik* (Javanese traditional costume), *blankon* (Javanese traditional hat)-*turban* (Arabic Style traditional hat), a classroom with tables and chairs-a classroom without tables and chairs (students sit on the floor), etc. These binary oppositions become the main frame that shape the integrity of the story and the integrity of cultural identity of Nusantara inside a film.

Relation of Binary Opposition in Identity Interpretation of Nusantara Culture

In structuralism perspective, the title Sang Pencerah in this film is becoming an emphasis that refers to the binary opposition between enlightenment and darkness. In linguistics, *pencerah* means giving enlightenment or hopes that changes the dark into the light. Therefore, Sang Pencerah in this film refers to a man that is able to use the light he had to change the condition of his place of living. It can be identified later that this title is metaphoric since the enlightenment happens here is not only the actual condition of changing the dark into the light, but more to change the

livelihood of the people, especially in the practice of Islam in Javane' Space and time Javanese story.

The text of this film explicitly sends the message. Verbal and visual description about the misery of Yogyakarta society also the practices of superstition, mysticism, and other irrational behavior are given in this movie as the dark side. From here, the film narration is then moving and paying more attention the contradiction between binary oppositions.



Figure 5. Dahlan's Departure to Mecca
Source: Sang Pencerah Film, Documented by Researcher (2016)

On the scene of Dahlan's departure to Mecca to deepen his knowledge about Islam, it is explicitly seen that Dahlan is willing to spare his family and Yogyakarta society from the bondage of darkness. In semiotic, it is symbolized by the action of Dahlan who left Yogyakarta and went to Mecca. Binary opposition is then seen from the willingness of Dahlan who went to Mecca in the age of 15 instead of in older age when people usually did. This creates the relation of binary opposition between Dahlan's perspective of thinking and people surrounded him. At this point, it can be interpreted that Dahlan attempts to present a new rationale on the darkness (old rationale) owned by Yogyakarta society during that era.

In Javanese culture's perspective, phenomenon shown in Ahmad Dahlan film is linear to Javanese's philosophy *Urip iku Urup*. It means that the prosperity in human's life lies in the meaning of giving and not asking. Second, *Urip ike* (Life is) *Urup* (a flashlight). Here, it means that the prosperity of human's life lies in their ability in becoming a 'light' that may lighten the life of other people (Musman, 2015, p.36). Therefore, meaning that is under-

lined here is that life is bright and needs a light on (vision). In addition, life supposed to be filled with the act of giving to others.

Thus, from the philosophy, this scene seems to be the reflection towards proverbs *eling miring sesame* and *waspada ing lair lan batine* inside Dahlan. *Eling miring sesame* is an attitude of caring to others as a realization that in this world, man cannot live alone (Bayuadhy, 2015, pp. 18-19). Whereas *waspada ing lair lan batine* is an action of being aware inside and outside ourselves (Musman, 2015, p.68). With this awareness, a man is able to employ a deep thought that is different from other people. This awareness comprises readiness on oneself to face various disasters or risk either the real or hidden one. Sharpening one's soul to face the challenge of life is closely related to one's way of thinking. An inner alert becomes a cornerstone of thinking that may born one's smartness, brave, firmness, wisdom, and a high concern as well.



Figure 6. Violin and Furnished Classroom with Tables and Chairs
Source: Sang Pencerah Film, Documented by Researcher (2016)

A binary opposition relation can be also found during the scene shows that Dahlan equips the classroom of his *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) with tables and chairs. This scene is emphasizing binary opposition between modern and traditional learning method in Islamic boarding school. Whereas coat and *blankon*, Javanese traditional hat, wore by Dahlan in a government classroom can be interpreted as a marker that is opposed with *lurik*, Javanese traditional clothes, and *turban*, Arabic Style hat, is also used as a tradition shift marker.

Besides, the scene where the violin is used by Dahlan in teaching Islam can be

interpreted as a confirmation of binary opposition between traditional and modern teaching method. The violin itself is interpreted as a Western culture product that is fully opposed the tradition of Islam. Here, the violin is opposed tambourine. The visualization of the tambourine is sent from the scene where there is a procession of *hadroh* that is played when Dahlan is about to fly to Mecca. Tambourine contains the aspect of collectivity, crowded, massive, and used as a symbol of traditional character. While, the violin is individualist and acts the symbol of modern character. The voice produced by tambourine can be interpreted as an outer sound which means that the sound produced is limited to people's ear production. It can only be heard. On the other hand, the sound produced by the violin is inner. It means that the sound produced can be internalized by people's deepest heart. Therefore, Dahlan is using the violin as one of his strategies in teaching his students since it considers to be awakened and is able to encourage people to understand and internalize the taught given.

This is can be interpreted as Hanung Bramantyo's, the director, way of emphasizing the interpretation upon the values of openness, carefulness, and smartness had by Ahmad Dahlan in facing differences, negotiating, adopting, struggling, and communicating his thought, also changing his society into a better and more modern taught. Up to this point, we can learn that differentiation is natural to happen within a group of people who try to live hand in hand in a certain society. Differentiation, however, is a means to achieve harmony. Contradicted cultural value can be interpreted and selected intelligently until we able to mutually reinforcing without neglecting up to the point that we may destroy the core value national culture. In Javanese philosophy, this perspective of life is interpreted as the attitude of *ngluruk tanpa bala* and *tan kena mbedak-mbedakke*. *Ngluruk tanpa bala* has meaning that fighting or struggling does not always need mass. Victory does not always achieve through war or

fight, besides, by an intelligent communication and negotiation (Musman, 2015, p.97). Whereas, *tan kena mbedka-mbedakke* is an action of appreciating differences to create and keep the harmony of life (Bayuadhy, 2015, p.179).



Figure 7. Kyai Cholil and Ahmad Dahlan
Source: Sang Pencerah Film, Documented by Researcher (2016)

From the relation analysis, therefore, subjectivity contradiction formation between K.H. Ahmad Dahlan – Kyai Cholil Kamaludiningrat is considerably seen real. Here, we can see that Ahmad Dahlan and Kyai Cholil are in the relation that both of them want the position as a leader. In other words, they basically are on the contradiction of the system. Ahmad Dahlan's way of thinking is basically formed from modernism subjectivity while Kyai Cholil's is more to the traditional one. In this framework, Ahmad Dahlan sees Islam from the ratio of science in which religion supposed to be free from tradition. Therefore, Ahmad Dahlan is resistant towards tradition and claim that any practices about superstition and mystic are not justified. On the other hand, Kyai Cholil sees Islam as a traditional person in that era. He is basically traditional and anti-differences. For him, religion seems helpless in facing problem in that era.

From the message attached in the film, we may learn that an action of over distinction tends to belong to cultural fundamentalism (Sugiharto, 2016, p. 1). This is considered to be dangerous since it shares the same understanding and definition of racism. It turns out to be unrealistic attitude and blurs the clarity of the human's way of thinking about complexity of problems in real life.

In the final scene of the film, however, this conflict is finally able to be solved

with local intelligence, compromise, and tolerance (Saidi, 2012, p.80). This is seen from the dialogue between two central characters in the story who finally realize that they are both Moslem who share the same religion that is Islam. It means that they are brothers who need to remind, respect, and protect each other's role in protecting Islam. They also agree to learn together to be a pure person in front of God since only Him knowing the truth that they are arguing and debating. A human can only struggle. In Javanese philosophy, this scene can be interpreted as *kena ing cidra* that is correction and self-improvement (Bayuadhy, 2015, p.145), and *memayu hayuning bawana, ambrasta dur hangkara*. The proverb means that human lives in this world by attempting to achieve the feeling of safety, happiness, and prosperity, while at the same time wanting to destroy anger and greed (Musman, 2015, p. 65).

CONCLUSION

Based on the study result, it can be concluded that through the structure of meaning contradiction, the film entitled Sang Pencerah is able to significantly raise and shape Nusantara's cultural identity. Therefore, Sang Pencerah is not only a film that appoints a famous figure as the central of the film, but broader to uphold and discuss tradition versus modern society phenomenon that becomes an issue.

Although Sang Pencerah is considered as a very modern film, however, the traditional aspect is not cornered, injured, or abandoned. A new rationale that is given by Hanung Bramantyo through his film can be also considered as Ahmad Dahlan's. A rationale that is based on local wisdom that is rooted in Javanese culture's noble values of philosophy. This is supposed to be an eminence that needs to be attached inside Nusantara's society and become its own integrity identity that may balance dynamics in a more complex cultural contradiction.

On the other hand, the strategy of contradiction used in this film, can be also

interpreted as a message from Hanung Bramantyo, that culture is basically grown from conflict. Even, culture is the conflict itself. Both the radical and light conflict are both appeared in every culture and human civilization's history. Thus, culture is supposed to be able to be interpreted as unlimited space for the emergence of continuous comment, conflict, and value. Culture cannot be placed as a nostalgia of exclusivity that tends to be mystic and isolated from the more modern space and time. It means that culture as well as tradition are supposed to be open for contextualization, interpretation and application in line with the dynamics of a certain era.

It is certain that culture is moving, interacting, contradicting, and exchanging to other culture. However, that norm of culture will drive Nusantara society to finally find its identity since the authenticity of Nusantara society lies on their intelligence to face culture comes in and comes out their surroundings. Differences and outside influences will then force the real identity of Nusantara to appear. On the other hand, isolation will limit the identity to emerge. It is due to the nature of culture that is formed from contradiction and influence from other's cultures.

Finally, it can be understood that through Sang Pencerah film, all meanings of culture are able to be summarized and interpreted smartly by Hanung Bramantyo. In the end, this film is able to drag us to a contemplation that the peace in our world can be achieved when all human realizes that they are all the same. They live in an unlimited world in which human

can lead the world and limit one's action.

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